

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Iwo Jima 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion of Honor  
21 March 2015

Minister Nakatani, Ambassador Sasae, distinguished representatives of the Japanese and United States governments . . . Japanese Self-defense Forces, United States Sailors and Marines, and most notably, veterans of the Battle for Iwo Jima, it is my distinct honor to pay tribute to the unfathomably brave men who fought here 70 years ago. While I cannot begin to understand the hell that enveloped this small Pacific island for 36 days in 1945, I can fully appreciate the debt of gratitude owed to the warriors who withstood that hell, and to those who paid the ultimate price.

On behalf of generations of grateful Americans, I thank the veterans who sit here among us and those who are with us today only in spirit. Legends of your intrepidity here at Iwo Jima will echo through the ages, not just in the Marine Corps, but in the story of America- thank you.

In the midst of the formalities of ceremony, it's important to reflect on the realities of war. Simply walk through the black sands of Iwo Jima's shores and spend a moment in one of its dark tunnels. Only then can you begin to fathom the unbelievable, and at some level, past human, fortitude, it took to charge these beaches under withering fire, or to fight from a subterranean labyrinth for 36 days. A few heroes here know that courage . . .the rest of us can simply wonder with awe and admiration and respect.

The Commandant and other's description of the valiant efforts of Marines reminds us to pause and reflect on the immeasurable sacrifices displayed here, never to be forgotten.

But also we should look to today and to the future as well as to the past. While we gather here in commemoration of 93,000 sons of Japan and the United States, who fought on these sands as bitter enemies seven decades ago, there is no better way to honor their legacy than to underscore the bond that now exists between our two great nations as a result of what they did here. We honor the fallen through the strength of our friendship. Rising from the inferno of Iwo Jima, our partnership developed in the wake of war and has grown ever stronger in the years since.

Today, the United States and Japan are interdependent. Through cooperation in everything from international security to free trade, we depend on one another so that each nation may live in peace and prosperity. The U.S. and Japan stand together today as Sailors, Marines, Soldiers and Airmen, as nations, and as friends. An example of this took place in 2011, in the immediate aftermath of the devastating earthquake and tsunami which hit Japan. During Operation Tomadachi, or “Friendship,” the United States Navy and Marine Corps deployed over 16 ships, 130 aircraft and 12,000 Sailors and Marines, who delivered 340 tons of relief supplies to our partners in distress.

Aboard USS Ronald Reagan, then Japanese Minister of Defense Toshimi Kitizawa said, “I have never been more encouraged by and proud of the fact that the United States is our ally.” Ambassador Sasae, Minister Nakatani, we as Americans are equally encouraged and proud to say the same about Japan.

As partners, we will face together whatever challenges the future brings, but we will never forget the lessons of our past. To overcome trying times, we will invoke the character traits demonstrated during the Battle for Iwo Jima: honor, courage, and sacrifice. To the veterans here today, and to your comrades who have been taken by

battle or by time, no words will ever adequately express our profound gratitude for what you did and what it cost you.

As we depart and carry a message of remembrance back to the United States and Japan, I am reminded of a famous World War One epitaph that applies to the heroes of Iwo Jima:

*“When you go home, tell them of us and say,  
For your tomorrows these gave their today”*

From the Navy, Semper Fortis: Always Courageous.

From the Marines, Semper Fidelis: Always Faithful.